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SUBJECT: CODEL CARDIN MEETS WITH GOM OFFICIALS

¶11. (U) SUMMARY. On February 15, 2010, a five-member Congressional delegation led by Senator Cardin met with Moroccan MFA Secretary General Youssef Amrani and MOI Director of Internal Affairs Mohammed Tricha. The parties discussed regional stability, human rights, counterterrorism, and other domestic and global issues. Amrani stated that the bilateral relationship is built on friendship, respect, and cooperation. Senator Cardin highlighted the role Morocco plays as a regional leader in human rights and security efforts but urged the GOM to do more to thwart trafficking in persons (TIP) and child labor. The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of Western Sahara and the Middle East peace process. END SUMMARY.

Domestic Overview

¶12. (U) A five-member Congressional delegation led by Senator Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) and including Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL), Rep. Laura Richardson (D-CA), and Rep. Eni Faleomavaega (D-AS) met on February 15 with Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General Youssef Amrani and Ministry of Interior Director General of Internal Affairs Mohammed Tricha. The Ambassador, D/Polcouns, and Political Assistant accompanied the Congressional delegation. Amrani and Tricha were joined by MFA Director of Communications Karim Medrek, Americas Director Fouad Yazourgh, and Americas Desk Officer Abderrahim Rahally.

¶13. (U) Amrani opened the discussion, thanking the CODEL for its visit to Morocco and describing the relationship between the United States and Morocco as one based on shared values of democracy, human rights, friendship, mutual respect, and cooperation. He described Moroccan social and political reforms, particularly with regard to the role of women, freedom of the press, and the development of a vibrant civil society. He praised the U.S-Morocco Free Trade Agreement, calling it a "breakthrough" in relations, and stated that Morocco can benefit greatly from increased interaction with the U.S. economy. Amrani said that Morocco's domestic reforms have created a strong economy and political system, and that the focus is now on judicial reform and education. "Islam is compatible with democracy," he said, adding that a country can be Arab and Muslim and still maintain dialogue with the West.

¶14. (SBU) Amrani then described Morocco's vision to build a democratic state marked by free, transparent elections and strong civil society. There must be democracy in both the design and implementation of policy, he said, recognizing that the country can do more to advance this vision. He said the country has built a strong center, and the King's regionalization initiative will give more power to the regions to manage human resources.

¶15. (SBU) Turning to security issues, Amrani noted that AQIM remains a threat in the Sahel and the Sahara, and that there is the danger of destabilizing linkages between terrorism and organized crime.

GOM initiatives to combat terrorism include economic development and social and political reform. Amrani acknowledged Morocco faces challenging political and security issues, but stressed that it is a country that knows where it is going as it seeks to "enlarge the space of freedom" both internally and externally.

TIP, Women's Rights and Child Labor

¶6. (SBU) Senator Cardin thanked the GOM hosts for the warm reception and acknowledged the strong partnership between the United States and Morocco on counterterrorism and for the leading role Morocco plays in the region in promoting human rights and regional stability. He expressed concern over trafficking in persons, and he pressed the Moroccans to ensure that TIP victims are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. He urged the GOM to address the issue of child labor and to protect children from the often abusive practice of using them as domestic servants.

¶7. (SBU) MOI Director Tricha addressed the TIP issue, asserting that GOM statistics show a decrease in illegal flows of people across Morocco's southern and eastern borders. He said TIP, along with the drug trade, gives a new economic dimension to terrorism, which was traditionally linked to poverty but is becoming tied to these lucrative activities. Amrani called the fight against trafficking in persons "a GOM priority," and he added that AQIM uses migration routes to transport drugs, people, and weapons. Amrani discussed Morocco's initiatives to fight TIP through education and increased economic opportunities for women.

¶8. (SBU) Representative Richardson complimented Morocco's efforts to address women's issues, noting in particular the success of women candidates in the most recent local elections. Turning to health concerns, she urged the GOM to ensure that sufficient budget resources are available to treat breast cancer and other diseases, especially in rural contexts where the level of care is much lower than in cities. Amrani replied that progress has been made, but agreed that more could be done.

Religious Freedom

¶9. (SBU) Representative Aderholt noted Morocco's history of religious tolerance and inquired about reports that Moroccan security services had broken up a meeting of a group of Christians, detained the Moroccan participants and expelled an American citizen. Amrani stated that it is part of Moroccan culture to live side-by-side with Christians, Jews, and others, but that the country must recognize the danger of extremism and promote tolerant Islam. Tricha added that people are free to worship but must act in accordance with Moroccan laws that expressly criminalize proselytizing. The security services are obliged to react, he said, when the potential for disruption of public order exists.

Global Issues

¶10. (SBU) Turning to Afghanistan, Senator Wicker stated that the situation is improving, adding that there are many ways countries can assist. He asked the GOM to consider providing additional support. Citing Morocco's status as a major non-NATO ally and its participation in NATO missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, Amrani replied that Morocco cooperates on a range of strategic issues. He characterized GOM counterterrorism efforts as a form of support to the mission in Afghanistan, and stated that the GOM continually reviews its relationship with NATO.

¶11. (SBU) Representative Faleomavaega asked his GOM interlocutors if the military option was the best approach to the problem. "How from a Muslim point of view can the Al Qaeda issue be best addressed?" he inquired. Amrani replied that the issue required a multi-dimensional approach. The military is important, but communication and outreach to the people are crucial. Al Qaeda is using Islam, he said, to advance their goals. They have reached the Gulf of Guinea, and Morocco is working to stop them, just as

countries in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere must work in their respective regions. The international community must use all available legal tools, he said, in fighting Al Qaeda.

¶12. (SBU) Wrapping up the discussion, Amrani raised briefly the Western Sahara issue and Middle East peace. He stressed that the GOM engages in good faith in efforts to find a compromise solution to the status of the Western Sahara, but he called them a failure. The issue needs to be resolved, he said, because the region cannot afford instability. In discussing Middle East peace, he noted the GOM's concern about the lack of progress and reiterated the need to advance a two-state solution. In his concluding remarks, Senator Cardin said the GOM can play a positive role by offering its good counsel in support of efforts to build confidence between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

¶13. (U) CODEL Cardin has cleared this cable.

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